It was a sad day on August 1, 2016 when we first learned of the passing of our beloved friend Dr. Patricia Cranton. She had been our vibrant and brilliant colleague for a long time, but we were both privileged to teach with her at Penn State University—Harrisburg from 2005-2011 when she was on our faculty. During those years we engaged in many discussions about adult education and transformative learning (TL) theory, and those conversations continued both verbally and in writing long after she left; they were full of scholarly engagement, some argument, and a lot of dry wit and fun. Here we share some of our reflections of Dr. Patricia Cranton, as we did at the XII International Transformative Learning Conference in Tacoma, WA in October 2016. Our comments about her here touch on our personal reflections of her as a friend and colleague (where we refer to her in the familiar “Patricia”), but mostly discuss what she contributed in her scholarship to the advancement of TL theory and practice (where we refer to her more formally by her surname). Indeed, Patricia Cranton was a scholar, researcher, prolific writer, mentor, colleague, friend, collaborator, worker bee, and lover of all things living, ....The list goes on and on.

Patricia: The Person Behind the Writing

To contextualize our reflections, we begin here with a brief story about Patricia that speaks to some of who the person was behind her prolific writing. When she came to interview at Penn State University—Harrisburg in the early Spring of 2005, one of us asked at the end of the
interview if she had a metaphor to describe herself as a teacher and scholar. Without missing a beat, she explained that she was also a photographer, and went on to describe one of the photos she had taken that perhaps captured what we were asking. While these are not her words exactly, she described the photo of rocks at the bottom of a creek-bed, rocks and stones of many sizes and shapes (sort of like her students) made visible by the light streaming through the water. She explained that the light acted as a lens that gave a particular perspective on the beauty of each rock. Her job as a teacher and a scholar was to help students get in touch with their lens, the light or perspective through which they were seeing, and to examine what assumptions were embedded in that perspective. Further, she wanted her approach to teaching to be as fluid and transparent as the water, which is partly what she thought it meant to be an authentic teacher. We were reminded of this story when we learned of Patricia’s passing, and students and colleagues began sharing some of her photos; when we saw the one below, it was clear that this is the photo she was referring to in that interview so many years ago.

The metaphor and the photo somehow make Patricia’s light and wisdom more visible and more clear, not only about her teaching and scholarship, but also about her way of living and being that informed her scholarship. As those who knew her well can attest, Patricia was a high introvert, with a dry sense of humor, which she did readily share but probably only with those who got to know her well. As a teacher, she was extremely learner-centered, and she was all about having students come to voice. She was generally a quiet person, who skillfully used her calm brilliance to help students take charge of their own learning. That calm brilliance was likely fueled, in part, by her long walks in the solitude of the woods. These long walks are likely what inspired and clarified her thinking and fired her pen alive, making her quiet in-person voice, shout in the written word and in the visual art of her photography. She loved nature, photo shoots, the wild places of the earth, and her companion animals (especially her beloved dogs Cookie and Foxy), all of which are components that contributed to her unique ways of
seeing. Patricia clearly listened to the beat of her own drum. She cared for the earth with such conviction that she was vegan for more years than many of us have been alive, and lived the kind of minimalist lifestyle out of a firm and steadfast commitment, which is simply an idea for most of us. While she had traveled much in her life in both physical and metaphorical ways, in her last few years after she left Penn State, she wanted to stay at home with the animals and the landscape that she so loved. She continued to write and to teach online, but did so with her photographer’s eye ready to capture the next abstraction or natural wonder, informed as she was with her unique way of seeing. Indeed, she captured these ways of seeing both in her photography and in her prolific writing.

**Cranton’s Scholarship and Teaching:**

**The Advancement of Transformative Learning Theory**

Dr. Patricia Cranton had a long career, and her many writings contributed to the advancement of transformative learning theory. She was a great collaborator and was eager to engage with students and other scholars on issues related to furthering the development and relevance of transformative learning theory and practice, as well as exploring its limitations. Hence, she has a long list of publications that are both collaborative and sole-authored and her work, especially in TL, has had far reaching effects. She was particularly adept at taking complex ideas and making them understandable, especially for those just beginning to study the theory of TL. This ability is particularly evident in her book, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, which was recently released in its third edition (Cranton, 2016). This ground-breaking text, first published in 1994, offered for many their first introduction into the theory and practice of TL, influencing the theory’s interest and access well beyond the field of adult education. In many ways, metaphorically then, she was like a “town crier” spreading the word of TL through her work, taking care to publish her ideas relating to transformative learning and teaching in publications beyond the field of adult education both in journals with colleagues (e.g., Carusetta & Cranton, 2005; Kreber & Cranton, 2000) and in her books (Cranton, 1994, 2001, 2016). Scholars from many disciplines across the academic spectrum continually reference her many publications.

To better understand her contribution to the field of adult education and more specifically TL we decided to look back over her work and identify thematically what some of the major contributions she and her writing colleagues made to the theoretical development of TL, roughly in the chronology of its development, though many of these themes are revisited in her numerous publications over time. Although her scholarship extended well beyond the boundaries of TL, more of her research fell within it, and as such provided a critical mass of work of which to explore, analyze, and identify key areas where she helped shape the field. Hence our focus in this discussion is her work particularly in regard to the expansion and understanding of transformative learning theory and its practice, building on and critiquing and expanding on Mezirow’s (1991, 2000) work while drawing on the work of other scholars to shape a more integrated vision of TL for the field. In particular in what follows, we explore her work related to the role of TL, and: a) her emphasis on the individual; b) the notion of authenticity; c) the importance of “extrarational” perspectives or ways of seeing/knowing; and d) a more integrated theoretical perspective.

**A Primary Emphasis on TL and the Individual**
There have been many critiques of Mezirow’s theory made over the years as being overly focused on the individual than the social context. While Cranton was aware of these critiques, her focus throughout much of her own writing was on the fact that ultimately it is *individuals* who transform (Cranton, 1994). However, she was keenly aware of the influence of the social context, and wrote in her final text summarizing the relationship between the individual and the social context:

> we see the world through a lens constructed in our interaction with our social context. We also make decisions related to our perceptions in our own way. We are individuals living in and influenced by our social world, and we are *individuals* with important differences among us in the way we live, learn, work and develop. (Cranton, 2016, p. 61-62, emphasis added)

Hence, her focus remains more on the transformation of the *individual* in light of the social context, but on the individual nonetheless, though she does recognize the influence of factors related to social location such as gender, race, and social class. Further, her focus tends to be on individual differences from a Jungian or depth psychological perspective based on her earlier work with colleagues (Cranton & Knoop, 1995; Cranton & Roy, 2003), and on others in the field (e.g., Dirkx, 2012). Drawing on Jung’s (1971) theory, in her collaborative writing (Cranton & Knoop, 1995; Cranton & Roy, 2003) and in her most recent work (Cranton, 2016), she cautions about not over interpreting Jung. At the same time, she emphasizes the relevance of an understanding of a Jungian perspective on psychological types (extroverted-introverted, sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, etc.) to transformative learning theory.

Earlier in her career, building off Jung’s types Cranton and Knoop (1995) developed an instrument, the “P.E.T Type Check” (or “Personal Empowerment Through Type”) based on an aggregate of dominant and auxiliary personality types, and with components from empirical, interpretive, and critical perspectives. The instrument was used so that individuals could learn their profile specifically for understanding differentiation (individual uniqueness), and then could engage in a transformative process of bringing what was unconscious into the conscious leading to greater individuation and TL. They saw these psychological types as habits of mind that shaped how individuals respond to and engage in the process of TL. In essence, differences found in individuals in the process of TL could be partially explained through psychological types, such as, for example, in how they process a disorienting dilemma, engage in critical reflection and discourse. Furthermore, this perspective on the importance of individual differences established a rationale, for example, for being able to explain why those with an intuitive preference would more likely “engage in the imaginative, holistic, extrarational experience and those with a preference for feeling would go through a relational or connected transformation” (Cranton, 2016, p. 77). Hence, while Cranton did have a clear understanding of the importance of the social context, her emphasis was on the *individual* and how the individual transforms in light of her or his personality, brought further depth of understanding to the TL process.

**Authenticity**

Another of her significant contributions to the study of TL has been the exploration of authenticity, its underlying assumptions and related implications for teaching and learning. She has discussed this both on her own (Cranton, 2001, 2016) and in her collaborative conceptual work with others (Cranton & Roy, 2003) and in her research work with Ellen Carusetta in a study of educators’ authenticity (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004A, 2004B; Carusetta & Cranton,
2005). This notion of authenticity actually follows a larger theme of her writing as hinted above: a focus on the development of the Self, individuation and the implications the notion of development has for the educator, as an individual and as a teacher. In using the issue of faculty development as an example, much of the faculty development literature focuses mostly on instrumental strategies and techniques, and tends to give little attention to factors, such as the teacher’s personal dispositions, values, beliefs and ways of being in the world (Cranton & Carussetta, 2004A). Her discussions and emphasis on teacher authenticity builds on the work of others in the field of adult education (Brookfield, Freire, Jarvis, Palmer) who suggest teacher authenticity is a critical component of good teaching. For example, Parker Palmer speaks to its significance by stating that: “our deepest calling is to grow into our authentic self, whether or not it confirms to some image of who we ought to be” and that “true vocation that joins self and service” (Palmer as cited in Cranton & Carussetta, 2004A, p. 21). In essence, in their discussions of authenticity Cranton and Carussetta (2004A, B) following Palmer and others, attempt to put meat on the bones of a very nebulous and illusive construct through research and conceptual discussion. In so doing, they highlight that authenticity is rooted in the idea that teaching is not simply a technical activity but a relational endeavor. It is a multi-dimensional construct that includes at least four essential parts, that of “being genuine, showing consistency between values and actions, relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity, and living a critical life” (Cranton & Carussetta, 2004A, p. 7). Based on research, they find that faculty who have a good understanding of themselves, both as individuals and as teachers, are better able not only to articulate what they believe, but their actions tend to be more congruent with their underlying values.

Cranton also takes up this notion of authenticity and expands on it in her latest book (2016), emphasizing that the unit of analysis cannot focus exclusively on the individual. She recognizes that teaching is bound by context reflective of a social process, that both can enhance and limit an individual’s authenticity. Authenticity is not a state but an ongoing process of transformation where educators can potentially move from a fragmented-self (beginning authenticity) towards a more mature authenticity. In the beginning process of authenticity, the teacher self is seen as the authority, having an unquestioned perception of others, a one-dimensional view of student-teacher relationships, context is inflexible, and a superficial reflective practice. In the more developed and mature authentic teacher perspective, there is an understanding of the self as the same and separate from others, an appreciation for the uniqueness of individual students along with commonalities, an awareness of the complexity and tensions of teacher-student relationships, and a deeply critical reflective practice (Cranton, 2016; Cranton & Carussetta, 2004B). In essence, teacher authenticity is not just about identifying a series of traits, but involves recognizing the paradoxes that exist in being oneself while dealing with the social context including the constraints posed by the institution, student-relationships, and one’s own underlying assumptions about teaching and learning (Cranton, 2016).

Ways of Seeing: Extrarational Perspectives

As intimated above, Cranton clearly recognized the limits of Mezirow’s original focus on the role of the rational and critical reflection in TL. This is something she discusses to some degree in her initial text (Cranton, 1994), but expands on to a great degree over time. She refers to the fact that learners come to know in their multiple ways of seeing, through what is often referred to in the contested term of “extrarational” perspectives (contested because the term still foregrounds “rational”). Such so called “extrarational perspectives” include ways of knowing
through imagination, affect, metaphor, the arts, symbol, spiritual experiences, etc. Cranton and Roy (2003) first discussed these aspects at some length in an attempt to develop what they first referred to as a “holistic perspective” (p. 86) of TL. After reviewing some of the strands of TL, they basically suggest that how individuals actually transform by drawing on both rational and extrarational ways of knowing depends on their personality and life experiences. For example, they state:

If we bring these strands together, we can say that the central process of transformative learning may be rational, affective, extrarational, experiential, or any combination of these depending on the characteristics of the individual and the context in which the transformation takes place. One person, depending on his or her psychological preferences, may consciously engage in a self-reflective process, whereas another may see the journey as an imaginative one. (p. 90)

This way of knowing is further substantiated in her collaborative work on the development of a survey that assesses the outcomes and learning processes of transformative learning offering statistical support to these and other ways of knowing (Stuckey, Taylor, Cranton, 2014). We also see an echo of the earlier theme of an emphasis on the individual and her or his personality factors in a social context, but with a recognition of the role of extrarational perspectives.

She and Randee Lawrence expanded further on this notion of ways of seeing and the role of extrarational perspectives in TL (Lawrence & Cranton, 2009, 2015). They write a personal and a conceptual perspective on how the experience of photography has contributed to their “way of seeing” and their TL experiences (Lawrence & Cranton, 2009). They include some of their photography within the text itself, which helps the reader understand through a combination of pictures and words how the experience of photography has shaped their own transformation. Further, they discuss the implications of these multiple ways of seeing through photography for both TL theory and practice. In their 2015 book, they creatively examine the transformation of seven fictional characters, questioning the notion that fiction is simply fiction, and highlight that fiction is a form of knowledge about human experience, fictional stories made real through the author’s experience and imagination (Lawrence & Cranton, 2015). They examine the themes of “learning” of these seven characters. Their work here adds another dimension of theorizing about the role of extrarational perspectives of TL. Hoggan and Cranton (2015) further explore the role of reading fiction in transformative learning through more traditional research means in their study of students in higher education, though they do not discuss this as an “extrarational” approach, but examine specifically how reading fiction can foster TL.

While Cranton contributed greatly to the discussion of extrarational perspectives on transformative learning, and how these extrarational ways of knowing affected her own view of transformative learning, she always did so with an eye on critique, including the very notion of extrarational perspectives. In her work with Ilhan Kucukaydin, while they celebrate such perspectives, they also suggested caution, and note the difficulties of the discourse around these extrarational perspectives (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012). Much of their discussion centers around both the limitations of the language and that different people attach different meanings to different terms, and the fact that there is often neither definition of what is meant by different terms nor a common understanding of what is being talked about. Hence, while they applaud the new directions of extrarational perspectives, they express the need for continued critique and end their discussion by saying, “While celebrating the development of transformative learning as a theory in progress, we, adult educators, should not stop critically examining current developments” (p. 53). Embedded in this quotation then, is Cranton’s constant penchant for
having her eye on critique at the same time that she is into expanding and integrating transformative learning theory for a more unified perspective.

**Integrated and Unified Perspective**

An extremely significant area where Cranton makes a huge contribution to TL was in attempting to create a more integrated and unified perspective on TL (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Cranton, 2016). She was concerned about the theoretical fragmentation of transformative learning theory and discussed it as early as 2003 (see Cranton & Roy, 2003). However, she notes that such fragmentation “is fairly typical in the development of a new theory, but the time has come to work toward integration rather than further fragmentation” (Cranton, 2016, p. 31). For example, within the field of adult education Mezirow’s (1991, 2000) cognitive rational framework had been the dominant version of TL, but many scholars also draw on other theoretical orientations such as the lens of depth psychology (Boyd & Meyers, 1988; Dirks, 2012; Cranton, 2014), and developmental psychology (Keegan, 2000) where the individual is the primary unit of analysis. Some scholars further ground their discussions of TL in emancipatory learning, including Freire’s (1984) work that emphasizes social justice, the cultural-spiritual dimension (Tisdell, 2003), race-centric perspectives (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006), and or the environmental or planetary view (O’Sullivan, 1999). Many such scholars refer to aspects of TL grounded in Mezirow’s work, but tend to focus more on the socio-cultural context and draw on theoretical orientations that tend to foreground the sociocultural context. While these discussions are enormously helpful and useful in the field, Cranton (2016) and others (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Taylor, 2008) suggest that this also can result in a fragmentation of TL, which can have certain effects. One, is the dualistic analysis (individual and social) implying an unnatural binary view overlooking the complexity and overlap between perspectives and where “in a more unified theoretical stance we would think about how people engage in both ideology critique and individual transformation and how these processes complement each other” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 12). Secondly, this fragmentation also contributed to a porous boundary between the understanding of TL as unique form of adult learning compared to more instrumental forms of learning and led to the misuse and overuse of the term “transformation” in relationship to learning. This fragmentation likely provided the bases for concerns and critique raised by fellow scholars. Brookfield (2000) for example discussed that TL is about change at a fundamental level and indiscriminate use of the term leads to a lack of meaning and validity. Similarly, and more strongly was a critique by Newman who argued that indicators of TL such as developing a more open worldview and greater confidence are indicative of any kind of “good learning” and challenged the field if TL was distinct form of learning. And fostering TL in practice was simply good teaching.

Cranton, ironically, saw the limitation of Newman’s critique in his overreliance on Mezirow’s work which tended to limit his point of view, not recognizing the implications of alternative perspectives of TL and how Mezirow’s work has evolved overtime (Cranton & Kasl, 2012). In the final edition of her book (Cranton, 2016), she makes a definitive effort to argue for the field to move towards a more integrative perspective of TL. She first establishes that there is an inherent link between connected and relational knowing and independent and autonomous knowing based on research erasing the distinction between the two, where both exist in synergistically in TL. Secondly, is the debate around social change, where Mezirow and others have been criticized for not giving enough attention to this important construct. She responds by illustrating that many of the practices relevant to fostering emancipatory education are consistent with transformative education. Furthermore, she takes the position that:
Whether the transformative learning process is an individual or social justice endeavor depends on circumstance, and both are valid and reasonable ways of engaging in transformative learning. Individual transformative learning depends on a person calling into question her or his assumption, beliefs, and values...[while] social justice involves calling into question social norms, social values, and issues related to oppression....What is being questioned is different, but the process may be the same...the outcome is a deep shift in perspective. (Cranton, 2016, p. 42).

In the end then, it seems that Cranton’s perspective of TL seems quite similar to Mezirow’s, though she places much more of an emphasis on the social context. She has primarily a modernist view of change, with a focus more on the individual’s transformation and how that happens, rather than on social transformation.

Conclusions

Patricia Cranton has contributed immensely to our field and to the theory and development of many aspects of adult education, but of the development of transformative learning in particular. While she applauded the new directions of transformative learning in its concerns for extrarational perspectives, and those that take into account the social context and social justice concerns, her own contribution was especially in her attention to the detail of the multiple ways an individual might transform her or his perspective. She was a deep thinker, and a great collaborator as indicated by her numerous co-authored publications. While she was an introvert, she made her voice heard as her pen was fired alive through her great walks in nature with her companion animals. Perhaps even more significantly is that she encouraged others to share their own voices and ideas in dialogue. Just as the stones in her photo depicted above in her metaphor of teaching are made visible by the light, the voices of her co-authors, former students, and many colleagues are made much more audible as a result of dialogues with her. What a role model! What a legacy she leaves! Hence, we close this discussion of her work with a poem – a series of seven haikus — written and shared by one of us (Tisdell) at the XII International Transformative Learning Conference in Tacoma, that gets at the multiple dimensions of Patricia Cranton as a transformative teacher, learner, and contemplative person.

Dimensions of Cranton: Making Stones Shout (by Elizabeth J. Tisdell)

Silence, solitude
Piercing like light through water
Making these stones shout.

Silence, solitude
Photos of ways of seeing
With transformed new eyes

Solitude, walking
With canines through fields of gold
Fires her pen alive.

Silence, writing life
Metaphoric voice alive
Translates complexity

And we, here present
Inspired by your brilliant work
Gratefully transformed.

Silence, solitude
Walking in your caravan
Your legacy lives.

Silence, solitude
Pierced as light through water, we -
You've made these stones shout!

References


